



On Sirasa TV
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Permission to breathe? *Sri Lanka 2048* looks at challenges of cleaning up our polluted air

Sri Lankans are exposed every day and night to a range of air pollutants which threaten their health. For example, the fine suspended particulate matter known as PM10 is estimated to cause each year, in Greater Colombo area alone: some 3 million cases of respiratory illness; 1,000 cases of chronic bronchitis; 150 premature deaths; and health costs amounting to a total of US\$ 30 million.

Doctors have long known how air pollution causes or aggravates acute childhood asthma. But the lack of monitoring makes it very difficult for medical experts to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between worsening air pollution and deteriorating health.

Air pollution has been a growing concern in Sri Lanka since the early 1990s, and over the years various attempts have been made to control it. However, due to lack of political will and sustained interest, many plans were not properly implemented. Significant increases have been seen in the levels of key pollutants such as SO₂, NO₂ and CO. With the potential for increased large scale industrial activity and greater use of thermal power for electricity, air pollution will get worse unless stringent measures are taken.

These are among the key issues being addressed in this week's programme of *Sri Lanka 2048* -- an innovative series of television debates exploring prospects for a sustainable future for Sri Lanka in the Twenty First Century.

The debate will be broadcast on Sirasa TV at 10.45 pm on Thursday 29 May 2008. It involves -- as panel and studio audience -- over two dozen Sri Lankans from academic, civil society, corporate and government backgrounds.

This week's panel comprises (from L to R): **Prof. Manouri Senanayake**, Consultant Pediatrician, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo; **Prof O A I Ileperuma**, Department of Chemistry, Faculty of Science, University of Peradeniya; **Raja Amaresekara**, Executive Director, Integrated Development Association (IDEA), Kandy; and **Sugath Yalagama**, President, CleanAir Sri Lanka. The debate is moderated by Sirasa TV's versatile presenter **Kingsly Rathnayaka**.



The debate is based on the premise that air pollution has emerged as a major environmental and health problem in Sri Lanka, especially in the Western Province: more than 80% of Sri Lanka's industries operate in close proximity to Colombo, and most are small or medium scale. Main sources of outdoor air pollution are the transport sector (called mobile emissions) and industries and factories (called stack emissions). Indoor air pollution is also a problem especially in households using firewood and in small industries.

Measures to control and reduce air pollution have sometimes stirred much controversy. A ban on the import of two-stroke petrol engines was announced in 2007, and came into effect from January 2008. This has led to protests from large numbers of three-wheeler drivers who feel their livelihood is threatened by this move. Meanwhile, the much-delayed vehicle emission testing programme is finally going to be implemented from mid 2008 - even though some capacity issues remain.

Sri Lanka has also recorded some successes in combating air pollution. Phasing out lead in gasoline in 2002 was a significant achievement. Recent studies have shown that the blood Lead level in traffic policemen has dropped significantly since then, coming within the WHO safety limits. The country has now set a target of 2010 for introducing low sulphur diesel.

The *Sri Lanka 2048* debates are co-produced by TVE Asia Pacific, an educational media foundation, and IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, in partnership with MTV Channel (Private) Limited. This TV series is supported under the Raising Environmental Consciousness in Society (RECS) project, sponsored by the Government of the Netherlands.

For more information on the *Sri Lanka 2048* series, visit: www.srilanka2048.com

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